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“Because us weirdos stick together”

A critical discourse analysis of representations of “weirdness” and kinship in Disney's animated kids tv-series *The Owl House*

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GNVK22, VT26

Bachelor thesis, 15 hp

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Abstract

This thesis examines the discourses and experiences of what it means to be “weird” through representation of the phenomenon in the popular Disney kid’s cartoon *The Owl House*. By following Fairclough’s five-step model and theoretical framework for critical discourse analysis, the analysis reveals that discourses within the fictional world are woven around a tightly hegemonic system of ideology and identity formation, which works to exclude denizens who do not “fit in”. The analysis mainly utilizes Stuart Hall’s understanding of stereotypes and hegemony, Foucault’s panopticism, and bell hooks’ discussions of othering and kinship that characters in *The Owl House* who experience these exclusions are then drawn to one another, forming new bonds of kinship, and are able to, despite the othering they have faced, resist the oppressive power system together. The results chapter concludes that representations of “weirdness” in *The Owl House* are linked to practices of othering through stereotypes that are encouraged in the fictional society. The response of kinship then becomes an act of counterhegemonic rebellion. Additionally, the thesis discusses what it means for a markedly progressive show like *The Owl House* to still engage with topics that have otherwise been neutralized as too controversial for Disney.

Key words: Othering, Kinship, Hegemony, Critical Discourse Analysis, *The Owl House*, Disney

Nyckelord: Andraifiering, Gemenskap, Hegemoni, Kritisk Diskursanalys, *Ugglehuset*, Disney

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1. Introduction

Through feminist literature, like bell hooks's *From margins to center* (1984), readers are made aware that as our societies are structured mainly at the behest of the powerful; there are systems of inequality built into their machinations. The voices of the disenfranchised, the marginalized communities, allow for greater insights into the inner workings of these systems of power. By listening to the stories of those that have been deprioritized by and in the system, it becomes possible to challenge preconceived notions of power. Representations of marginalized groups and their stories are an important facet of cultivating more equitable societies.

That is why a children's TV show like *The Owl House* (Terrance, 2020-2023) is so important. It prominently features marginalized characters, young and old, who have been bullied for being different, and it shows the young audience that though it hurts, it will be okay. This representation of being outcast and then finding people like oneself is helpful for kids and adults alike. The fact that it is aimed at kids just makes it all the more impactful, as this show also dives into *why* societies are structured the way they are. It shows relatively realistic expressions of how people are marginalized within strict systems of power, and it does it through a medium which is itself a strictly regulated: kids media.

Media aimed at kids/minors is put under more scrutiny in order to be published. This is in large part because much of the contemporary sociocultural understanding and discourse about children is that they must be protected and nurtured. Topics in media made for kids are therefore made more black-and-white for the meanings to come across, and certain topics are censored. That is to say: the discourses as represented in a kids show are very rarely allowed to criticise hegemonic ideologies and ways of living, and are usually washed clean; sanitized for the vulnerable target audience that kids are perceived to be. Analysing representation and how discourses are shaped in these cartoons can therefore allow a great insight in the mechanisms behind discourse building in the real world.

1.1. Aim

The purpose of this essay is twofold. On one hand, to uplift the representation and message of what it means to be ostracized and the power in finding community in the show *The Owl House*. For a person of any age or background watching, representations of what it means to lack community and to find it can be very insightful. This aspect will utilize Stuart Hall's theories of representation and stereotyping, and then dive into bell hook's discussions of the margins, othering, and how the other carves out a space for themselves to survive in the hostile center.

On the other hand, to aim a critical eye on how this representation is being shown. To consider how hegemonic understandings of expected behaviour still slips through the cracks, even media that has been limited by institutions of power for being too progressive. This part will be more central to the thesis's Discussion section.

These aims will be accomplished by diving into the universe represented in this show, and seeing how its internal discourses are shaped and utilized to tell a story of othering, resistance, and kinship.

1.1.1. Research questions

RQ1: How is “weirdness” used as a denomination of social identity and otherness in Disney's *The Owl House*?

RQ2: What discourses of power are legible in the show's reading of deviance and resistance?

RQ3: How does the show portray the formation of solidarity and kinship in relation to otherness and to what consequences?

1.2. The research field

The following section will delve into the current research field and academic texts relevant to the themes and topics of this thesis. Studies researching censorship and the Disney corporation are relatively prevalent, as are studies involving themes of exclusion and inclusion, though they often find themselves in a more narrow and reality-oriented research field. The short study to be discussed in this section also uses *The Owl House* as a basis for

its study, and expands to discuss the sociocultural and political context that the show was produced in.

1.2.1. “The real emperor was society all along”

This short study by Doctor Agnieszka Urbańczyk was published in the Polish journal “Studia de Cultura” ([Vol 15, no 3](#), 2023). As the text is originally in Polish and this bachelor project lacks funding for a human translator, online translating tools have been utilized to get an approximate English version. To reduce the risk of misinterpretation, caution has been exercised in the reading of the translation.

Urbańczyk’s study centers the context within which *The Owl House* was created and discontinued, as well as the elements of fascism that are depicted in it. To start, she delves into the publicly available information regarding the show's discontinuation by Disney, as there had been speculations that the cancellation was due to the progressive nature of characters and storylines. According to the sources Urbańczyk was able to find, the discontinuation was supposedly a decision by Disney representatives prompted by its structural incompatibility with how shows are televised on Disney Channel, and not its contents (Urbańczyk, 2023, p. 131). As the creators of the show were made aware that they would not be renewed for a third season, executive producer Dana Terrance stated in a Reddit thread that she did not wish to assume ill intent from the media conglomerate (Urbańczyk, 2023, p. 131).

However, Urbańczyk continues, suspicions arose from fans and creators as Disney made questionable release decisions. It is shown to be unclear to what extent Disney wished to cancel *The Owl House* for its counterhegemonic representations, but Alex Hirsch, one of the co-creators of show (as well as executive producer of *Gravity Falls*) was at the time very vocal online about his critiques of Disney’s strict guidelines. Urbańczyk cites a post from Hirsch Twitter/X account, in which a [video](#) depicts some of the notes Hirsch had been given by Disney's Standards & Practices department for *Gravity Falls* (Hirsch, 2022-06-16). This video gives a concrete insight into what the media conglomerate views as safe versus unsafe for kids and overseas audiences (or, arguably, parents and company shareholders) (Urbańczyk, 2023, p. 132).

With this seemingly hostile situation in mind, Urbańczyk continued by studying “what a cultural text might look like when its creators have nothing left to lose and either stop caring about the producer's guidelines or engage in open warfare with them.” (Urbańczyk, 2023, p. 132). What she found was that from season two onwards, as the creators knew their remaining episodes were numbered, the worldbuilding expands to include prominent and plot relevant queer and nonbinary characters, as well as complex, extensive, and relatively realistic representations of fascism and proto-fascism where the members of the society are manipulated by the dictator to happily dig their own graves (Urbańczyk, 2023, pp. 133-137). To conclude, Urbańczyk writes:

The moment the struggle for an audience was stopped, one of the best studies of fascism in popular culture to date was created, not reducing it to aesthetics, but analyzing it as an ideology that can captivate millions. (Urbańczyk, 2023, p. 137)

The short study effectively reflects on the power Disney wields over their projects, and how, in the creation of this show, the artists were to some extent able to fight back. As Urbańczyk points out, the show would not have become what it is without this battle, and the passion of its creators.

What this thesis aims to contribute to the research field is a deeper look into *The Owl House*'s internal structure of discursive practices and their consequences. Specifically, how the internal discourses build up processes of marginalization and resistance that lead the members of the fictional society to side with the powerful and ostracize those which pose a threat to the hegemony, and how the marginalized handle this imbalance. To look at the representations of othering and kinship, and see in what ways it reflects feminist research on these topics.

2. Theory

2.1. Stereotypes and hegemony

Stuart Hall writes about the significance of *hegemony* as it relates to *stereotypes* in chapter four of the second edition of *Representation* (2015). The chapter, called “The Spectacle of the

‘Other’”, starts with Hall describing the difference between *typing* and *stereotyping*. With the help of Richard Dyer's essay “Stereotyping” (1977), Hall argues that the core of both of these terms is a diminishing of a group's complexities down to sets of easily graspable and discursively reproducible core concepts, but that what sets stereotyping apart is how it “reduces, essentializes, naturalizes and fixes 'difference’” (Hall, 2015, p. 247) between the stereotyped other and the hegemonically accepted groups.

Hall continues by explaining how acts of stereotyping use ‘splitting’ to separate what is seen as “normal” and naturalized versus the “abnormal” / “unacceptable” (Hall, 2015, p. 247). These differences are then further exacerbated by practices of closure and exclusion, leading to boundary setting, “a symbolic frontier between the 'normal' and the 'deviant’” (Hall, 2015, p. 248). The walls that are built up play into *us-vs-them* narratives, and the concept of the *other* and *imagined communities*. These phenomena then work to reinforce the idea that the stereotyped other does not “belong” or “fit in” with the rest of “normal” society.

Hall explains this concept by using Mary Douglas's idea of things that are *out-of-place* being treated as “polluted, dangerous, taboo”, connected to Julia Kristeva's term “‘abjected’ (from the Latin meaning, literally, 'thrown out’)” (Hall, 2015, p. 248). These concepts will be used in conjunction with the concept of the “other”, as detailed in section 2.3.

Then, finally, those that had the power to stereotype another begin with are able to justify the exclusion of the targeted group, as they are seen as something which does not belong, something that is out-of-place. This “gross inequalit[y] of power” (Hall, 2015, p. 248), the power to shape the worldview of the masses, can in simplified terms be called *hegemony*.

Hall lifts Dyer, who explains this hegemony as “the establishment of normalcy” (Dyer, 1977, p. 30): The ruling groups are able to construct the worldview of society as a whole, through intentional and unintentional acts based on their own understanding of the world. What they believe and claim to be “natural” and “normal” is dispersed down to the masses, and becomes the hegemonic understanding of the world. Hall writes: “Hegemony is a form of power based on leadership by a group in many fields of activity at once, so that its ascendancy commands widespread consent and appears natural and inevitable.” (Hall, p. 248). The power is naturalized and normalized, making hegemony the default viewpoint of those who remain uncritical of structures of power.

2.2. Panopticism and disciplinary power

For a deeper look into what systems uphold hegemony, one does not need to look further than Foucault. In his book *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault discusses the repercussions of penal systems, and how institutions of power shape societies with surveillance and threats of punishment. One of the examples Foucault raises to explain this is the *panopticon* prison, and the subsequent *panopticism* that expands the structure into a more widely applicable phenomenon (Foucault, 1977, p. 200). Foucault describes Jeremy Bentham's design for the structure, in which a central tower allows the guard to view any cell in the encircling periphery from the same centralized vantage point, while simultaneously shielding the guard from the view of the prisoners with strategically placed lighting. The idea was that the inmates would not be able to know whether they were currently being observed, but knowing that they at all times *could* be observed, and therefore had to modify their behaviour to one which would not upset a potential guard (Foucault, 1977, p. 201). Foucault writes:

The Panopticon is a machine for dissociating the see/being seen dyad: in the peripheric ring, one is totally seen, without ever seeing; in the central tower, one sees everything without ever being seen. It is an important mechanism, for it automatizes and disindividualizes power. (Foucault, 1977, pp. 201-202)

This concept expanded into its -ism by considering how it can be interpreted as a mode of operations in which structures of power are upheld in the bounds of society, as its members self-regulate to conform to hegemony through fear of retribution by an unknowable observer (Foucault, 1977, p. 223). By placing oneself in a public space, and subjecting oneself to the gaze of others, one is placed under panoptic surveillance; any bystander might well be the allegorical guard, ready to reprimand.

This self-regulation in fear of retribution is what Foucault calls *disciplinary power*. It operates with a quiet omnipresence, reliant on always seeing, but never being seen but its subjects (Foucault, 1977, p. 187). This constant threat of surveillance brings with it the same normalizing effect as it did for the prisoners of the panopticon:

It is a normalizing gaze, a surveillance that makes it possible to qualify, to classify and to punish. It establishes over individuals a visibility through which one differentiates them and judges them. (Foucault, 1977, p. 184)

Foucault writes that this gaze is what enforces homogeneity in its subjects, and in turn creating minute differences among them through close examination (Foucault, 1977, p. 184). It is around these differences that hegemonic discourses are constructed, marking some subjects as legitimized persons with more agency, and others as deviants.

2.3. Weirdos and othering

As seen in *The Owl House*, people are often referred to, and indeed refer to themselves, as “weird”. The term is oftentimes used in the show as a stand-in for diverse forms of marginalization, similarly to how the *other* is theorized to be constructed according to contemporary social sciences.

The term *othering* is discussed by Mara Lee in her dissertation *När Andra skriver* (2014). She writes that “[a]ndraifiering är en process som tilltar och minskar i styrka beroende på vilka relationer, skillnader och likheter som framhävs.” (Lee, 2014, p. 16). This points to the same processes that were discussed in subsection 2.1. Othering, like stereotyping, works by pointing out relational identity differences, and then diminishing the less-hegemonically approved identity by reproducing essentialistic ideas about people with that identity through prejudicistic discourse. Marking someone else *the other*. Through this perspective, othering could be interpreted as one of the processes through which stereotyping is put to practice.

Lee also writes that she wishes to be careful with the term *other*, to not define it too harshly, as to avoid the risk of making the result of an exclusionary practice be the vessel for further exclusions (Lee, 2014, p. 16). It is a thoughtful consideration. For much of academia the work is focused on categorizing and defining, as to more easily understand each other and speak in the same language. But this does not work for every discipline. Understanding the *other* as a concept starts with listening to those who have felt its embrace when hegemonic society has turned a cold shoulder.

An author who has written extensively on this subject is bell hooks. In her article “Choosing the Margin as a Space of Radical Openness” (1989) hooks writes about her experiences living in privileged spaces as an othered person. She describes the misery that is often accompanied by the space not allowing for her and bodies and experiences like hers: “Everywhere we go there is pressure to silence our voices, to co-opt and undermine them.” (hooks, 1989, p. 19). hooks explains that though living in the margins of society kills her and other members of othered communities, entering the privileged cultural contexts is just as dangerous. It might not be death by state neglect and the repercussions that it brings, but it is death by societal exclusion: “Yet when we few remain in that "other" space, we are often too isolated, too alone. We die there too.” (hooks, 1989, p. 19).

She explains that in order to survive as a marginalized other in the privileged center, one must fight to carve out a space for oneself, and for one's community. hooks writes:

Those of us who live, who "make it", passionately holding on to aspects of that "downhome" life we do not intend to lose while simultaneously seeking new knowledge and experience, invent spaces of radical openness. Without such spaces we would not survive.

(hooks, 1989, p. 19)

And within this space, to build “a community of resistance.” (bell hooks, 1989, p. 19). This brings us to the next relevant term for this thesis: *kinship*.

2.4. Kin and kinship

In the introduction to *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (2016) Donna Haraway prefaces that she offers no single definition to *kinship* or *kin*. Writing that: “*Kin* is a wild category that all sorts of people do their best to domesticate.” (Haraway, 2016, p. 2). The very sentence that this excerpt follows, however, could be argued to hold an apt description of the phenomenon: “Living-with and dying-with each other potently in the Chthulucene can be a fierce reply to the dictates of [earlier human epochs].” (Haraway, 2016, p. 2). This implication of kinship as “living-with and dying-with each other” is echoed in anthropological literature (see for example Sahlins 2013, pp. 8-9), as well the narrative of *The Owl House*, in which the main characters are shown to share a homestead (the titular Owl House),

and all three characters sacrifice their own lives to save one another. The themes of kinship run deep in the story that the creators wished to tell.

The conversation of kin and kinships continues throughout Haraway's book. In chapter four that Haraway presents a slogan for what she argues is the name of the epoch we are entering: the Chthulucene. The slogan, short and punchy, is "Make kin, not babies!" (Haraway, 2016, p. 103). During its introduction in chapter four of the book, Haraway explains her reasoning. As we (all living beings) head for increasingly acute climate disasters, we must start making kin amongst each other, as creatures of this planet. There are too many humans to keep going at a sustainable rate, and we are losing our connections to each other when we focus solely on our own bloodlines (Haraway, 2016, pp. 99-103). Kinship, in Haraway's meaning, is a solidarity that has to be radically divorced from the genealogy-focused term that it has become in many fields of research.

This point is seconded by Sophie Lewis in her book *Abolish the Family: A Manifesto for Care and Liberation* (2022). Though, to Lewis, the concept of kinship might be too closely tied to its genealogy and anthropological understanding to be of use in contexts that seek to abolish the institution of the family altogether. To Lewis, the concept of *kin* and family is near identical, using them simultaneously in her text:

When I say to you that you are "family," or that I think of you as "kin," I am saying "I love you, I care for you, I insure you, I hold you, I see you"—yes—and/but I am underlining this by using a metaphor that means I have no real choice about the matter. I am giving you a guarantee (we are kin) tethered to a metaphysical plane. (Lewis, 2022, p. 60).

This interweaving of concepts means that as Lewis proposes to abolish the family, the concept of kinship must also be shifted to better include other forms of solidarity:

We do not have to reject the language of kinship outright. Collectively, rather, we can begin to torque it. It's time to practice being kith or, better, comrades— including toward members of our "biofam"—building structures of dependency, need, and provision with no kinship dimension. (Lewis, 2022, p. 61).

Lewis's use of the term kinship forms a good example of the complexities of language, and how our contexts and discourses shape the connotations with which we understand the world

around us, as I personally disagree with Lewis on her interpretation of “kinship”. The concept need not be as intrinsically linked to the family of origin as it is reflected in her manifesto. What I will take from Lewis’s text therefore, rather than her interpretation of kinship as it relates to the (mostly nuclear) family, is her understanding of *kith*, as well as the noteworthy prevalence of family-bond related terms that have been added to the story of *The Owl House*. Terms like “sister”, “brother”, “aunt”, when used between characters who are not kin by blood, but rather by choice. One could easily dismiss these as being the “relevant” terms for a show aimed at children, but to that I counter, that this just makes their inclusion all the more telling.

3. Method

This thesis is placed in post-structuralist epistemological tradition, which will work in tandem with critical discourse analysis as its methodological framework.

3.1. Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

This thesis will be using critical discourse analysis. It is a method for making visible what otherwise often goes unsaid in a communicative event. As Taun van Dijk writes in “Multidisciplinary CDA: a plea for diversity” (2000), by diving into word use, intonation, and context of the utterance one can often reveal patterns of speech that conform to or reinforce preexisting power structures (van Dijk, 2000, p. 99). That is to say, noise isn’t made in a vacuum. Languages themselves have historically been shaped greatly by the institutions of the countries that use them, meaning that in many ways, power is *built into* the system of language, and thus the system of how we are able to conduct ourselves and interact with one another.

One way to untangle this is through critical discourse analysis. The method allows researchers to put a text under a microscope to discern the *discourses* that are being reproduced and questioned in the statement, and to then *critically analyze* this use of discourse in the sociocultural context it was stated in.

The way that critical discourse analysis does this is through its interdisciplinary building blocks. Winther Jørgensen and Phillips write in *Diskursanalys som teori och metod* (2000)

that CDA weaves together linguistic text analysis, Foucauldian macrosocialistic analysis of social practices, and micro sociological interpretative traditions (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, p. 71). This interdisciplinarity means that CDA allows for a complex understanding of how language is used to not just enable communication, but also how it shapes it, and is shaped by it.

The Foucauldian view of power also shapes further characteristics of CDA: its bias. Scott Burnett writes about the method in “Kritisk diskursanalys som feministisk metod” (2024), and points out this central aspect of CDA: in order to challenge and critique what could be considered “objective” knowledge production and its systematic bias for centralized perspectives, CDA placed itself as explicitly biased in favor of emancipatory and marginalized perspectives (Burnett, 2024, pp. 360-361). This aim is echoed in other literature on critical discourse analysis, for instance van Dijk (2000, p. 96).

Another aspect of CDA that van Dijk points out is its relative legibility. He points out that there is no use in fighting discourse if it is done in a language that can not be understood by the larger masses, especially the marginalized groups the researchers are fighting *for* (van Dijk, 2000, p. 97).

This brings the topic to feminist critical discourse theory. It has much in common with the larger umbrella term, but it aims to look more closely at how marginalized identities are represented in discourse and how it upholds norms and systems of power (Lazar, 2007, p. 142). More specifically, how gender and its hierarchies intersect with other supposed binary categories, and how these texts in which discourse is made has consequences for its larger sociopolitical context.

Though critical discourse analysis is as much a theory as a method, and does not need a strict structure to be conducted, there are still two proposed models for how to conduct an analysis through CDA. This thesis will utilize Fairclough’s five-step model, inspired by Bhaskar’s concept of ‘explanatory critique’, which allows a way to construct a critical discourse analysis and is helpful in instances of problem-based analysis, which will be the focus of this thesis (Fairclough, 2000, p. 125). Fairclough summarizes the steps as follows:

1. Focus upon a social problem which has a semiotic aspect.
2. Identify obstacles to it being tackled, through analysis of
 - a. the network of practices it is located within
 - b. the relationship of semiosis to other elements within the particular practice(s) concerned
 - c. the discourse (the semiosis itself)
 - structural analysis: the order of discourse
 - interactional analysis
 - interdiscursive analysis
 - linguistic and semiotic analysis.
3. Consider whether the social order (network of practices) in a sense 'needs' the problem.
4. Identify possible ways past the obstacles.
5. Reflect critically on the analysis (1–4).

(Fairclough, 2000, p. 125)

These steps aim to assist the researcher in uncovering the systems of power behind a discourse, and allow for a critique of how the discourse is shaped through this influence. It will be a useful tool as the analysis follows how the term “weird” is used in the discourses that have been built up to explain the system in *The Owl House*.

3.2. Ethical considerations

Though this thesis has no active participants nor handles any sensitive personal information, it still brings up relevant ethical quandaries about the positionality and reflexivity of the researcher. In “Att studera visuella material” (2024) Ellen Suneson raises how these aspects interact with the resulting analysis of visual media through processes of identification and disidentification in feminist methodological research. She explains that though it is important for researchers to consider their own situated knowledge, the focus should not be on whether or not this positionality makes a researcher able to fully put themselves in the shoes of their subject. Rather, the researcher should maintain an awareness of how they interact with these differences in experiences and knowledge, and how these differences shape their interpretations of the material (Suneson, 2024, p. 414). This process of (dis)identification is used by feminist researchers handling visual material to pinpoint how visual methods of analysis are intertwined with structures of power and how we (researchers and subjects alike) traverse these systems (Suneson, 2024, p. 425).

An aspect of this thesis that calls these terms to mind is the context and audience for which the material was created. Though *The Owl House* was created with children in mind, in an U.S. American context, it is possible for the researcher to acknowledge that while they do not share these particular contexts, they can still be reflexive in their interpretation of the material, and be able to identify discursive practices that pertain to the chosen themes.

Additionally, these themes of *othering* and *kinship* that this thesis will explore includes subjects that can be perceived as sensitive. These will be handled carefully, as to not create a platform which might be used to further perpetrate stereotypes and hegemonic discourses.

3.3. Material

The chosen empirical material for this thesis is the show *The Owl House*, henceforth shortened to *TOH* or “the show”, produced by Dana Terrance for release years 2020-2023, for Disney Channel (owned by the media conglomerate The Walt Disney Company). There are about 20 episodes each in seasons one and two, each around 25 minutes each, with season three having three hour-long episodes (Terrance, 2020-2023). This thesis will gather material from all three seasons of the show, primarily instances in which the material discusses weirdness, kinship and the hegemonic system that builds the discourses around these phenomena.

The story of the show itself begins the day that the wacky main protagonist Luz Noceda is transported away from a “Reality check” summer camp in the human world into a fantasy realm of witches, demons, and magic. It's everything she's ever dreamed of. There are other weirdos, Eda and King, who are just like her. But the world holds more dangers than her beloved fantasy book series prepared her for. In season one, Luz gets to know the other weird characters and learns more about this fantastical Demon Realm. Through season two they uncover the corrupt power system of the Boiling Isles and in season three they prevail, together and through all odds, and defeat the evil genocidal Emperor Belos (Terrance, 2020-2023).

Quotes and descriptions of the show were in part gathered with the aid of *The Owl House Wiki* (2024), an online fan-based wiki page for the show. All citations have been double-checked against the source material.

3.4. Limitations

To keep this thesis within its spatial and temporal constraints, several interesting branches of this tree of a project have been pruned. The first branch was the inability to follow more characters than two of the core three characters as they are shown to explore the fictional world of *TOH*. It was also unfeasible to follow more than two themes, and though othering and kinship are well suited for the material it could have been useful to expand to a larger view of the power model they are explored within. To this end, limitations were also made as to limit the analysis to the show's internal discourses, though a sociocultural aspect of the shows creation could have added further depth to why these representations were being shown the way they were.

4. Analysis

4.1. Step 1: Social problem with a semiotic aspect

The semiotic aspect that this thesis will analyze is the use of the term “weird” in the show *TOH*. In the universe of the show, characters are ostracized on the premise of “not fitting in” or being weird, which leads to exclusion and loneliness, and, if they do not stay out of the way, they are placed in correctional institutions by the systems of power.

The first episode of the show gives many examples of how the main character Luz does not “fit in” with the other children at her school, and it is Luz herself that recognizes this pattern of undesirable behaviour and calls it the “weirdness” (Terrance, 2020-2023, s1e1, 01:25). As the episode progresses, she sees this same marginalization in Eda and other characters of the Demon Realm. So what are the socially undesirable behaviours and identities that get understood as weird?

4.1.1. Luz Noceda

The main protagonist of *TOH*, Luz, is designed and written with features and behavioural patterns that correspond to identities which have been historically marginalized. She is shown to be a young girl, as well as gender non-conforming, neurodivergent and part of an ethnic

minority and a sexual minority. In *TOH*, most of these identities and intersectionalities are not a basis for which characters are shown to experience prejudice. Bar, perhaps, her ADHD.

The first episode of the show gives great insight into how Luz's behaviour and interests are seen as revolting for the other characters, and the main character is shown to be struggling with feelings of not belonging in a context that is supposed to be welcoming. As the prejudice goes unnamed but she still feels its effects, the show emphasizes the impact that these feelings of "not fitting in" greatly impact the main character in a similar way that Douglas describes the concept out-of-place (Hall, 2015, p. 248). Luz is shown to understand that she is not comprehensible to her peers, in the context she has found herself in (Terrance, 2020-2023, s1e1). She is, as Kristeva described, abjected; she is cast out from her community (Hall, 2015, p. 248). She explains herself as "weird", because it is the only term she knows.

As the show progresses, it is revealed that Luz lacks a biological component necessary to wield magic in the Demon Realm (Terrance, 2020-2023, s1e4). Luz, compared to the other humanoids on the Boiling Isles (called "witches"), is a human and therefore effectively magically disabled. While Luz later discovers glyphs, which lets her do magic regardless of her body, she is still stereotyped by other characters as human, and as such, according to the discourses of the Demon Realm, considered weak and fragile. This adds a second dimension to her social exclusion, as she is now out-of-place not just in an educational context, but a whole Realm (Hall, 2015, p. 248).

4.1.2. Edalyn Clawthorne (a.k.a Eda the Owl Lady)

When Luz runs into Edalyn, the witch had already spent most of her life as an outcast. Part of her exclusion is shown to be because of a curse she was given as a teenager. The Owl curse renders her incapable of handling her body, turning into a large Owl-Beast when she has overexerted herself magically, physically and mentally (Terrance, 2020-2023, s1e4). This state is shown to cause fear and anger amongst the other characters, leading to scenes where she is booed by crowds (Terrance, 2020-2023, s1e19) and chased down by animal control (Terrance, 2020-2023, s1e10). In a world where demons are otherwise normally occurring and accepted as any humanoid denizen, she is stereotyped, abjected and othered (Hall, 2015, p. 248).

Eda's curse/disability is not the only thing for which she is shown to be abjected, however. The prevailing social order of the Boiling Isles asks that all its denizens sort themselves into one of the 9 schools of magic, and seal their other magic away. As Eda wishes to keep all her magical abilities and was not able to join the tenth coven, the Emperor's Coven which is allowed to use all magic, she instead chose to evade the system, and to not get a sigil branded on her wrist at all (Terrance, 2020-2023, s1e19). She is hunted by the Emperor's guards for this. Not for doing anything illegal, but for placing herself outside of the strict system of control. To better reach her, a large bounty is put out for her capture, and she as well as other wild witches are vilified and stereotyped as dangerous by the official media networks of the Boiling Isles. This can be understood as a type of utilization of Foucault's panopticism, in which Eda and the other wild witches are placed under the surveillance of their peers; never knowing who might turn them in (Foucault, 1977, pp. 201-202).

4.1.3. Over-all

The characters of *TOH* are largely not oppressed on the basis of sexuality, gender, sex, race, ethnicity, or body type. On one hand, it is refreshing to be able to take part in a story where sexism, racism and queerphobias are virtually a non-issue (through traces could be inferred through world-building details). On the other hand, characters are still prejudiced against and othered through discourses around social norms. It raises the question: what prejudices have been left after the “problematic” ones were cut out?

Through the first step of CDA several themes seem to center the characters experiences of “weirdness”. There is ableism (and speciesism for Luz) and classism. Ableism for Luz and Eda's neurodivergencies, Luz “missing” a body part and Eda's disabling curse, and classism for Eda, as she refuses to take part in the societal structure of the Boiling Isles and is criminalized for it. These factors play into how the characters experience the world, and it leaves them with a miniscule social network, isolated in the margins of society. In the isolation they recognize that they are being excluded and othered based on a set of vague categories, and use the term weird to understand themselves as out-of-place and outside the hegemonic systems that have been built up on how people are supposed to behave and categorize themselves (Hall, 2015, p. 248). It's a way to take back the power of identification; they're not unidentifiable, they identify outside the norm, as weird.

4.2. Step 2: Identify obstacles to the problem being tackled

These othering discourses shown in *TOH* are practiced through the systems of power and networks of practices that are represented. There are two clear community spaces with informational and cultural exchange in the worldbuilding of *TOH*; the education and correction of the subjects in the Human Realm and the Demon Realm.

The practices of the school and summer camp of the Human Realm are not too different from what one might expect from their real world equivalences. What little parts are shown of Luz's human school involve scenes where she is expected to behave a certain way, follow a certain social script, but instead deviating from the hegemony. These instances could be boiled down to Luz expressing herself as her neurodivergency allows her to, and then how this expression gets shut down by classmates as well as school administrators. She is avoided by classmates, and told to go to a conformist summer camp by the principal (Terrance, 2020-2023, s1e1).

The discourses of the Human Realms school environment is depicted as one where normalcy and behaving within the socially expected boundaries are paramount. Even showing yourself as accepting of what the community's discourse has named detestable becomes a sign that you yourself are socially unacceptable. The spiders, snakes, sausage link "guts" and inverted eyelids are considered out-of-place and abject in the network of practices of the school environment. It "doesn't belong", in the same way these concepts are explained by Mary Douglas and Julia Kristeva (Hall, 2015, p. 248).

In another context, Luz's affinity for the morbid would be a wondrous asset, but in the network of practices of the Human Realm's classroom it is instead something to be avoided, excluded, feared; treated as something other.

Which is part of the reason Luz is so eager to stay in the Demon Realm: there's so many wonderfully weird things there. It is then interesting to see how she now doesn't "fit in" – in the opposite way. Instead of being too much she now finds herself lacking an important part of what it means to be a "fully" functioning member of society in the hegemonic context of this realm. She is still othered, by the system and people's interpretation of normalcy.

Luz's main point of interaction with the inhabitants of the Boiling Isles is through Eda and attending Hexside School of Magic And Demonics. Through the school, the social structure of the Boiling Isles is explained: students at the school pick one of the ten tracks of magic to study (Abomination, Bard, Beast Keeping, Construction, Emperor's Coven, Healing, Illusion, Oracle, Plant and Potions), and later become accepted into that coven as a worker. As the denizens are accepted into a Coven, their wrists are branded with that coven's symbol, which also seals away the wearer's ability to use other types of magic (Again, witches of the emperor's coven are exempt, and retain access to all types of magic). It is explicitly stated in later episodes that this limitation is to prevent inhabitants from being too strong. This is why Eda and other wild witches are hunted down and petrified so mercilessly, and why this Realm's version of the power-protecting police force are exempt from the no-other-magic rule.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault examines this power entrusted to police as a part of his section of Panopticism. Though there is no magic in the real world as it is shown in *TOH*, the power imbalance wielded by police is well documented. It serves to surveil the people into autonomously upholding the standards and hegemony set by the absolute power, under threat of force of the ever-visual police force (Foucault, 1977, p. 213). As witches of the fictional universe are denied their access to power through magic, so are denizens of the real world removed from tools of violence, as to make the threat of the policing force all the greater.

Another aspect of institutionalized power in *TOH* is Luz's interactions with the school of the Demon Realm. It is through this network of practices that Luz is told of Emperor Belos's ascent to power. On a school trip to the Emperor's castle, the tour guide/Emperor's assistant Kikimora paints a flattering image of the Emperor as a saviour of the people of the Boiling Isles:

Kikimora, [to the students of Hexside]: Today, the Isles are a place of peace and prosperity. But that wasn't always the case. Up until 50 years ago, witches and demons practiced wild magic during what we called the Savage Ages. Witches had access to corrupt knowledge, and that dishonored the Titan. That was, until our great Emperor ascended to the throne, and taught witches how to use magic properly. (Terrance, 2020-2023, s1e18, 08:01 – 08:26).

This sentiment had been echoed by Luz's classmates/friends earlier in the episode, telling the viewers that this is the understanding of history that is being portrayed to the masses through public media and educational systems.

However; in the following episode Luz's friend/adoptive demon brother King reads aloud from a history book (named "the unauthorized Boiling Isles history") that he found in the Owl House. The narrative is not the same as what had been portrayed by the Emperor's assistant and the school system:

King, [reading aloud]: The Boiling Isles, born from the flesh and bones of a fallen Titan. This original magic was so potent, all life on the Isles evolved to wield magic too. For years, we explored those powers freely. Until, a mysterious witch appeared who declared that he, and he alone, could speak to the island. He said that we were using magic all wrong. His teachings took hold, his strength grew, and he became... Emperor Belos. Belos said that mixing magic was wrong, that only he had that right. So he created the coven system. And there, our knowledge was restricted, and our potential sealed away. Those who resist are called wild witches, and they face harsh punishment.

(Terrance, 2020-2023, s1e19, 00:02 – 00:36)

The narrative follows the same discursive beats as the Emperor's approved revision told through Kikimora, although sceptically. The intratextual claim that only the Emperor had the right to wield all magic mirrors how Foucault describes the might of the king, an absolute power, which is only fit for the monarch themselves (Foucault, 1977, p. 215). Additionally, the restriction of knowledge is reminiscent of Foucault's discussions on "power-knowledge", which acknowledges the influence of the powerful over what domains of knowledge are available to its subjects, and how it is able to shape this access to knowledge, and therein also access to power (Foucault, 1977, pp. 27-28).

This ability to shape knowledge becomes apparent when Luz is shown Emperor Belos's own memories as she and Hunter/Golden Guard are magically transported into the Emperor's mind towards the end of season two. The memories show Belos tricking the witches of the Boiling Isles that he was preaching the word of the Titan, painting himself a saviour, then shouting that he is being "attacked" by "wild witches", as his assistant sets off his stage as instructed. The us-vs-them and othering rhetorics were utilized from the very beginning of this rise to power (Terrance, 2020-2023, s2e16).

Belos is shown to have specifically created a system and shaped its discourse that would limit the witches' access to knowledge and magic so that they would be easier to control, both through how they could be mentally manipulated and physically overpowered by his guards. He called it the "Titans will", meanwhile enacting the witch-hostile discourse he had been taught in 1600's Human Realm as a witch hunter (Terrance, 2020-2023, s2e16). This mirrors the narrative as explained in King's history book, as well as the foucauldian discussion of power-knowledge (Foucault, 1977, pp. 27-28).

Through these three different discourses about "the Emperor" *TOH* shows that history is sanitized and remade for the larger masses. Especially how it's sanitized for the educational system; for the *kids* (!).

This is intentional. As Foucault discusses in *Discipline and Punish*, the educational scene can be effectively utilized to discipline young to develop a power-accepting mind and obedient bodies (Foucault, 1977, pp. 165-166). The hegemony is built into the system and the minds of the young to reproduce the idea that there is a *correct* way to lead your life. Which means, e contrario, that there is an *incorrect* way to lead your life, which is reinforced as dangerous and foolish through disciplinary practices of exclusion and isolation; being othered.

The ideas of hierarchy and power seeps down through the system. There are several characters whose main motivation is attaining a higher social status. They primarily do this by exerting power over other characters. The power itself is usually drawn from higher authority. The students are working off of the hegemony that is being taught by the adults around them, the adults are drawing authority from proximity to Belos, and Belos himself claims to merely be acting out the will of the Titan (Terrance, 2020-2023, s1e19). This system of individuals policing each other reflects Foucault's panopticism; it does not matter if there are any actual guards present, just the threat of surveillance means the denizens live obliged to keep themselves in check (Foucault, 1977, pp. 201-202).

Through the second step of Faircloughs CDA it is shown that the discursive *hegemony* in *TOH* is driven by the institutions and further spiked by power hungry individuals within these systems. The obstacles to tackling the othering that lead to characters self-identifying with the term "weird" are therefore the ties that keep institutions under the control of a highly

concentrated, centralized and absolute power. The societal system that Belos is shown to have built up is hostile to deviancy. That is not a flaw of his design; it is a core mechanism of it. As Foucault states: “In the illegalities, the police-prison system segments a manipulable delinquency. This delinquency, with its specificity, is a result of the system; but it also becomes a part and an instrument of it.” (Foucault, 1977, p. 282). Though Foucault uses the term “delinquency”, as opposed to this thesis’s interpretation of weirdness as a “deviancy”, it is not difficult to see the similarities. As is depicted in the show, so does Foucault point out: the system benefits from the creation and vilification of the marginalized.

4.3. Step 3: Find out if the problem is needed in the social order (and in what way)

In the last episode of season one it is revealed that Emperor Belos has “grand plans” for the Isles, and as season two progresses these plans seem more and more ominous. By the end of the second season it is clear that Belos is planning a full-scale genocide of all witches of the Boiling Isles, wild or not. By channeling the power of a solar eclipse, Emperor Belos invokes a spell/ritual that drains branded witches of their magic, through their sigils. It is therefore *essential* to the character that as many witches as possible are branded, partly so they succumb by the spell, and partly so there are no wild witches with enough free magic who can interrupt the ritual (Terrance, 2020-2023, s2e21).

Even before the ritual is underway, this high categorization is shown to be working in Belos’s favor. With inhabitants of the Boiling Isles infighting about appearing “normal” and trying to out-rank one another in the eyes of the Emperor, they become incapable of seeing the larger picture and being able to critique why they are being taught to work one way or the other. There are, quite literally, a whole season's worth of episodes that the protagonists spend trying to either reconcile with the fact that they are othered and therefore stand outside of the system and that that's okay, or having to fight back against characters who are placing obstacles in their path simply because they don't “fit in” with what they think it means to be a member of society.

The idea of how the inhabitants of the Boiling Isles are supposed to live their lives is intrinsically linked with the idea of Emperor Belos as the savior. So to go against the

lifestyles that are laid out for them, is to go against the person in power. By “not fitting in” the denizens are defying the might of the Emperor, and placing themselves in open rebellion to the systems of power. In the first episode of the show, standing in a panoptic prison, Luz asks Eda: “Why does everyone think that being a weirdo is so bad?” (Terrance, 2020-2023, s1e1, 13:07 – 13:10). Because that's one of the discursive practices that enables the powerful to stay in power.

By weaponizing the masses to ostracize and other those who place themselves outside of the categories, outside of reach of control, those in power are able to effectively use the foucauldian panopticism of the masses and its disciplinary power to remove deviant individuals from systems of inclusion (Foucault, 1977, pp. 201-202). This then leads to the dangers of exclusion as explained by hooks; whether the othered is in the center or the margins, the exclusion kills (hooks, 1989, p. 19). Through this threat, those in power in *TOH* (and in the real world) are able to demand compliance and conformity.

In the analysis of the third step of CDA it is revealed that the problem *is* needed, and therefore upheld and reinforced by the system. The “problem” of deviants/“weird” individuals is needed both to punish citizens that don't stay in line and easily manipulateable and to act as a warning for those still acting according to hegemonic structure that deviancy will not be tolerated. It is a powerful us-vs-them discursive practice, the wild witches becoming a scapegoat for the problems on the Boiling Isles, as marginalized groups become the scapegoats of the powerful in the real world.

4.4. Step 4: Identify possible ways around the problem

4.4.1. Weirdos together

The first way around this hegemony-enforced othering, is *TOH* showing that the characters who have been othered by similar mechanisms coming together, and working together. While it is chance that brings Luz to Eda and King, it is her desire to find a place to “fit in” that informs Luz’s decision to stay in the Demon Realm:

Luz: I don't fit in at home. You don't fit in here. If I stay, we could not fit in together.
(Terrance, 2020-2023, s1e1, 20:02 – 20:08).

This kinship can be connected to the “community of resistance” that bell hooks describes (hooks, 1989, p. 19). The characters who have been marginalized by, and isolated from, their communities are left vulnerable. They strive for connection and community, to carve out a space for themselves and others like them within the system they find themselves in (hooks, 1989, p. 19). Luz, Eda and King – the Owl Family – are weirdos *together*. And that makes all the difference. As Eda says in the very first episode: “us weirdos have to stick together, you know?” (Terrance, 2020-2023, s1e1, 14:16 – 14:19).

4.4.2. Weirding another

Another avenue of problem solving is the changing of discourse by “weirding” another, helping them understand the harm in the discourses that are being perpetrated. This is especially true of Luz, who befriends most characters she meets, even many of the antagonists. This is deliberate, as it is a trait Luz greatly admires in the protagonist of her favourite book series:

Luz: Azura is able to befriend everyone. Even her biggest rival. I wish I had that kind of power.
(Terrance, 2020-2023, s1e7, 00:12 – 00:20)

Throughout the series, she befriends introduced-as-antagonists Amity Blight (s1e15 & s1e17) Lilith Clawthorne (s1e19), Hunter (a.k.a the Golden Guard) (s2e6 & s3e1), and The Collector (s3e3). They become part of Luz’s community of resistance, as hooks puts it (hooks, 1989, p. 19).

The last episode of the series offers a concise look into this process of making kin, as Luz confronts the aforementioned Collector. The last-minute antagonist is a cosmically old and immortal god-child, who was cast out from their peers in the stars, *abjected*, and who had been tricked and betrayed by those they trusted when all they wanted to do was play. As they have finally been freed and are able to force the main trio to play pretend with them, Luz can tell that something is upsetting them:

The Collector: I know it's just pretend. I don't care. I'll pretend as long as I want.
Luz: But that's not what you want, is it?
The Collector: What do you know?

Eda: We know what it's like to feel alone.

King: And abandoned.

Luz: And misunderstood. Hey, what if we showed you how we became friends?

The Collector (dismissively): King already told me about your adventures.

Luz: It's different when you can see them.

[Luz pulls out a stack of the memory pictures from the previous episode that showcase her, Eda and King's adventures.]

Luz: What do you think? Can we tell you our stories?

(Terrance, 2020-2023, s3e3, 15:06 –15:46)

By identifying the Collector's pain as one stemming from societal exclusion, the main trio is able to catch the abjected character and show them that there is hope in the margins. They show the god-child (and the audience) the bonds that they built as they lived together and faced challenges together, which echoes Haraway's implied understanding of kinship as living-with and dying-with one another (Haraway, 2016, p. 2). This representation, the Collector seeing others who have been othered and still found (or founded) spaces of radical openness, allows them to open up and start to trust characters around them. It has a great impact on The Collector. Maybe *too* great.

4.4.3. The unweirdable

Later in the episode, as the genocidal main antagonist Belos prepares to once-and-for-all kill everyone on the Boiling Isles, The Collector steels themselves and flies up to the face of the giant Belos-Beast that Belos has made himself into:

The Collector: I get it now. You just need kindness and forgiveness, huh?

[The Collector hugs Belos's skull. Luz, Eda, and King have stunned expressions on their faces, Belos blinks in confusion.]

The Collector: Luz, look! We can all be buddies now!

[Belos prepares to fire at the Collector, while Luz, Eda and King watch in horror.]

Luz: Collector! [She flies on her staff.]

King: No!

[As Belos fires his beam, it collides with a purple flash of light. Luz has flown in to save the Collector.]

The Collector: Huh? But I thought I was doing the right thing.

Luz (tears in her eyes): No, no, you did good, Collector. But this is a little more complicated.

(Terrance, 2020-2023, s3e3, 22:33 – 23:08)

Kinship has its limits. In the end, Belos is one of the few antagonists that Luz does not redeem, and does not attempt to seek kinship with. He had proven time and time again that he was not receptive to any other ideologies and discourses than his own. As Belos is dying from the boiling rains of the Isles, begging her for compassion, she just watches:

Belos [trying to keep his human shape, but dissolving to goo on the ground]: “Don't just stand there! You'll be just as bad, just as conniving, just as evil, and just as unforgivable as those witches! We're human! We're better than this!

(Terrance, 2020-2023, s3e3, 41:17 – 41:38)

Luz recognizes Belos's plea as manipulative and false. That he does not actually seek kinship; just one last attempt to manipulate another's feelings based on a false us-vs-them dichotomy. Yes, he was human, once. But the audience has been shown throughout the show that it is not the identities themselves that matter, but rather how they are understood or made incomprehensible in their discursive contexts. And so, Luz simply watches as Eda proclaims “Well we ain't!” (Terrance, 2020-2023, s3e3, 41:42 – 41:43), and walks up with King and Raine to the dying once-Emperor, and stomps him to death.

The Collector, having found the kin and community that allowed them to flourish in spite of being hegemonically othered, has trouble understanding why being offered the same wouldn't redeem Belos like it did them. The answer is simple: Belos is not othered by the marginalizing structures of hegemony, but privileged by them, and happy to reinforce them.

Those who cling to power are shown in *TOH* to be especially *unweirdable*, as they are the ones who rely the most on the systemic othering the weird. To apply bell hooks's theory of the center and the margins, one will find that the powerful will always be in the center. As they hold the symbolic and material power, it is them who shape what is understood to be normal; the center follows them. As such, they are the antithesis to the weird; an obstacle that can not be circumvented with the same kinship means as previously discussed.

Belos is an extreme example. But his character as representative of one who has grown up in a very hateful and xenophobic discourse, is echoed in the real world. People whose understanding of life includes ideas that some people are not really “people”, but rather vermin that must be purged. Though there are real-world support groups like [Life After Hate](#)

(founded 2011) who can help rehabilitate, it is clear that not every person can be separated from the discourse they believe to be their saviour.

This discussion brings to mind Karl Popper's paradox of tolerance; for a society to be truly tolerant, it must be intolerant of intolerance (Popper, 2013, p. 581). That is to say, though it is important to examine one's stance and attempt to seek compromise when possible, bargaining with the unjust will not lead to justice. In Eda's proclamation and Belos's death, the protagonists both reject the hegemonic discourse that has abjected them and establish a counterhegemonic discourse, in which what is abjected is the process of othering itself and those who gladly perpetuate it. By killing that which has been systematically killing them, they can start their society on a path that is more accepting of the weird.

So what is the way around the problem? *TOH* responds that while kinship and solidarity can help in large part to help people feel included and to work towards a common cause, regardless of how weird they are or recognize themselves as being, there can not only be focus on looking for ways *around* the problem. When the problem represented in the hegemonic discourse is so tightly knit to institutions of power as is shown in this show, the better response might be to build a community and use the kinship and solidarity to stand up *against* the problem. To remain intolerant of its intolerance. To raise our fists in anger, to fight against the hegemony that seeks to exclude us, and to make the oppressors understand that we will not roll over and play the role of scapegoat. Easier said than done, but easier done *together*.

This is a point that comes up often in feminist literature; the importance of solidarity work is nothing new to gender studies or activist organizations. What is so fascinating about this instance is that it is not only discussed with children as its primary audience, it is also told through Disney, a cooperation which has been a notorious stickler for following hegemonic discourses. Though stories centering the "power of friendship" are common in kids media, to explicitly discuss what it means for characters and their friends to live in an oppressive society, and for these characters to take up both in-universe and real world counterhegemonic positions to power is much less common. While it might be easy for feminist researchers to claim this is nothing new, it is important to keep in mind that these representations might well be first contact for many to these ideas of the systems as something to be sceptical of, rather than to trust implicitly.

TOH shows its audiences, young and old, that living in a system that is built to separate its inhabitants into easily distinguished and manipulateable categories, the exclusion that follows can be painful, but that embracing the otherness then becomes a rebellious act. To then find kinship in these margins, that becomes a revolutionary act.

4.5. Step 5: Reflect on own analysis

Looking back on the analysis, there are several aspects that could have been done differently. To start, the Theory section could have been included more elaborately and to greater effect, as the analysis as written is quite material-heavy, rather than solely analytical. If done again, it could additionally have been beneficial to find and use an interpretation of “kinship” that resonated more with the thesis premise, as this use became at times synonymous with “friendship” and “family” in a way that was not fully intentional.

Furthermore, it would have been interesting to focus the analysis on the character Hunter (a.k.a. Golden Guard) instead of Eda. Hunter's world view was massively impacted by Belos by being his right hand man and alleged “nephew”. There are many examples in the show of Hunter being led to believe that Belos was the only person who could or would be Hunter's kin, how Hunter handles living on the margins as he's learnt the truth and escaped, and the relief he is shown to feel when he is extended kinship by Luz and finds himself able to accept it. Even Hunter coming to terms with his grimwalker body not being understandable within the hegemony, and the guilt and fear he harbours at being found out. But that is a thesis for another time.

These are mainly reflections about how analysis and interpretations of the textual contents, the intratextual watsonian analysis, could have been done differently. At the start of the analysis, there were also considerations made as to whether or not to utilize the intertextual, doylean perspective. This dilemma would have been voided with the use of Fairclough's three dimensional model of CDA, which allows for this same effect of analysing a work's discourses within itself, then as part of its discursive practices in which it was created, and then how these these discourses are reflected within the larger socioeconomic contexts (Burnett, 2024, pp. 370-371; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000, pp. 73-75). This three dimensional model is newer and more well-used and explained in recent and relevant

literature, and would have allowed for an analysis of what it means for a show like *TOH* to be created within the confines of Disney, and then more broadly, how the discourses of kids media and their sanitation being perpetrated in the sociocultural and political landscape this thesis is written in. Alas, yet another thesis for another day.

5. Results

5.1. Discussion

In the context that this show presents, weirdness could be understood as a vocalization of the othering phenomenon. Whereas the other is more so named by the hegemonic by highlighting certain identities through its attached stereotypes, rather than the complexities and experiences that might come with it, the weird is instead used in place of any identity marker, and in itself becoming the othering effect. That's to say, instead of othering another by saying “she's just the [identity marker] in class”, weirdness is an identity marker itself: “she's just the weirdo in class”. It is used as a stand-in, catch-all allegory for counterhegemonic identities and expressions of self for discrimination practices that can not be named by the virtue of its medium. (Additionally, the word “weird” is arguably more prevalent in children's vocabulary and general discourse practices).

The characters are shown to understand that they do not “fit in” within their respective hegemonic contexts for what it means to be normal, and thus find themselves handled as an other placed in the margins of their contexts, like hooks describes. To make sense of this, the characters (primarily Luz) self-identify with the term weird as a way to understand how they are interpreted in a context that leaves no room for them, where they are seen as out-of-place. By denoting themselves as “weird”, they are able to allow themselves some semblance of power in how they are interpreted by the dominant-hegemonic social group, and allow them to find other others. This is the carving out space for oneself that bell hooks discusses. Luz is able to seek kinship with other weirdos, and together form bonds of kinship.

It is interesting to note that the kinship bonds that are forged in *TOH* are mostly ones which use a familial base structure and roles. “My kids”, “sister”, “brother”, “nephew”, “aunt”, and “the Owl Family”, tying the same connotations of genealogical bonds that Lewis observed.

The found family trope runs deep in the show, and seeing as the target audience are minors who very likely grew up in a family structure with these terms, it is a reasonable decision for the creators to have added these terms/roles as presently as they have. In the context of Lewis's interpretation of the family and kinship, as well as *TOH*'s theme of kinship as something that can be forged regardless of blood, it is interesting to see it still holding on to these familial terms. Here it becomes important to remember the influential power that is placed on the show and its creators by the media conglomerate Disney.

There are other aspects of *TOH* where this influence is made visible. For instance, there are no representations of prejudice based on skin color, gender presentation, or sexuality, because arguably, the creators as well as Disney know these topics are off-limits ~~for their shareholders~~ in the contemporary sociocultural context. So the fact that the show still has representations of ableism but no non-othered people with differently-abled bodies is something of a canary in the coal mine. There is still work and activism to be done in the field of critical crip studies, as it is not considered serious enough to be deemed "controversial", and thus, paradoxically, censorable.

5.2. Conclusions

Through the analysis and discussion the thesis arrives at the conclusions that answer the previously stated research questions. Firstly: "weirdness" is used as a stand-in catch-all allegory for identities and expressions that are seen as unwanted in the hegemonic contexts as shown in Disney's *TOH*. It is mainly used by the othered characters themselves and allows them the power to find a way to relate to the dominant-hegemonic social groups, though from the margins.

Secondly: the discourses of power that are legible in *TOH* largely stem from the hegemonic worldview that has been pushed on the populace of the Boiling Isles by the manipulative Emperor. The discourses themselves are used and manipulated by this Emperor and his loyalists to push the narrative of his rise to power, and which persons in the populations can be seen and ostracized as less-than-human. This othering works to affirm the us-vs-them narrative that is being pushed in the discourse, as othered characters try to resist but get construed as evil, thereby enforcing the idea of "wild" witches being something to reject as out-of-place or abject.

Thirdly: Kinship in Disney's *TOH* is formed as characters who have found themselves othered find each other. In sharing their stories and their lives they forge bonds of kinship that allow them to stand tall against the discursive practices that have been used to ostracize them. Then, as the characters start to fight back, they uncover that the problem is bigger than they thought. They are able to make others understand their cause, in a sense removing the veil of hegemony that shielded many to the realities of the political context they've found themselves in, allowing themselves to become deviant as well, another faulty cog in the machine, until the counterhegemonic consensus has grown enough that the characters are able to rise up to challenge the persons in charge.

Though these are the conclusions of a fictitious world's problems and solutions, it does echo contemporary literature on what it means to live in a society which does not have its denizens best interest at heart. Through Foucault's literature the thesis has explored the influence of the powerful, and how it is represented in the world's fight against corrupt systems. Through bell hooks it was analysed what this influence can mean for the individuals who are treated as something other, and how those individuals can still make a space for themselves. And lastly through hooks and Haraway, how this space can be used to create a sense of belonging, kinship, that transcends blood bonds.

That is to say, though it is not possible in *our* world to once-and-for-all slay The Emperor to release the populace from its power, we must still work together, and talk to one another, if we are to spread the hope of a better world. We may not be able to remove the tyrant from power, but we can make them understand that we, *together*, are a force that can not be ignored.

And that is very important for children to see. They are our future. They must have hope of a better world. Yes, some people are a little weirder than others. Isn't that wonderful?

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